



Chimney Rock National Monument

U.S. Forest Service, San Juan National Forest

Questions and Answers

Chimney Rock National Monument: At a Glance

- Located between Pagosa Springs and Durango in southern Colorado within the San Juan National Forest on 4,726 acres.
- Chimney Rock will be managed by the U.S. Forest Service



1. What is a National Monument? How are they designated?

A national monument is a designation given to a protected area of federal land, similar to a national forest or a national park. National monuments encompass landscapes and objects of tremendous beauty and diversity, ranging from rugged California coastline to vividly-hued desert canyons to precious cultural and archeological sites.

The Antiquities Act of 1906 grants the President authority to designate national monuments in order to protect “objects of historic or scientific interest.” While most national monuments are established by the President, Congress has also occasionally established national monuments protecting natural or historic features. Since 1906, the President and Congress have created more than 100 national monuments. National monuments are currently managed by agencies including the National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

2. Does the local community support the national monument designation?

There is broad and deep support for the designation of Chimney Rock as a national monument throughout the tribal, business, tourism, conservation, academic and cultural preservation communities.

This designation is a great example of bi-partisan work of elected officials from the local and national levels. Senators Michael Bennet and Mark Udall, Representative Scott Tipton, the Archuleta County Commissioners, the Mayor of Pagosa Springs, dozens of Tribes and Pueblos with cultural and geographic ties to the proposed monument, more than 27 local, regional and national preservation, archeological, tourism, academic and conservation organizations, and 117 business owners in the surrounding communities have indicated their support for designation of Chimney Rock National Monument through letters or resolutions.

A January, 2012 Colorado College State of the Rockies, Conservation in the West poll found that 93% of western voters across the political spectrum agree that “[o]ur national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas are an essential part of Colorado’s economy.”

3. Why does Chimney Rock warrant designation as a national monument?

The Chimney Rock site incorporates spiritual, historic, and scientific resources of great value and significance. A thousand years ago, the vast Chaco civilization was drawn to the site's soaring massive rock pinnacles, Chimney Rock and Companion Rock, which rise hundreds of feet to an elevation of 7,600 feet. High atop ancient sandstone formations, Ancestral Pueblo People built exquisite stone buildings, including the highest elevation ceremonial "great house" in the Southwest. The monument is one of the best recognized archaeoastronomical resources in North America. Hundreds of archaeological ruins and buildings from the Pueblo II period are within the boundaries of the site.

The monument is also home to unique vegetative communities. For example, several desert species generally found farther to the south are located on or near some of the archeological sites. A species of cholla cactus (*Cylindropuntia* sp.) has been identified at the High Mesa site which does not occur naturally outside of the Sonoran Desert and is thought to be associated with deliberate cultivation practices of the Ancestral Pueblo culture.

Chimney Rock holds great significance for Native American tribes in the southwest and all across the Nation. Descendants of the Ancestral Pueblo People return to this important place of cultural continuity to visit their ancestors and for other spiritual and traditional purposes. It is a living landscape that shapes those who visit it and brings people together across time.

4. How has the Forest Service involved Native American Tribes in the discussion of monument designation?

This designation is the result of deep support of community members, key stakeholders and tribal representatives. It is a shining example of bi-partisan work of elected officials from the local and national levels.



The Department of Agriculture has engaged in government-to-government tribal consultation on the proposed national monument. The San Juan National Forest holds at least annual tribal consultation meetings with relevant tribes and pueblos, and did so in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Because Congressional Chimney Rock legislation was pending during those time periods, the Forest Service engaged with the tribes regarding the proposed legislation and discussed the role of the Forest Service and the tribes in implementing the legislation should it be enacted.

In May 2012, the All Indian Pueblo Council approved a resolution endorsing the efforts of the Administration, in consultation with the Council, to establish the monument. The tribes retain historic hunting and gathering treaty rights. The management plan will protect and preserve access by tribal members for cultural, spiritual, and traditional medicine- and food-gathering purposes, consistent with the purposes of the monument, to the extent permitted by law.

5. Is the site protected now? How does the Forest Service currently manage Chimney Rock?

The Chimney Rock Archaeological Area encompasses 3,160 acres; the National Monument expands the area managed for its archaeological value to 4,726 acres. No private land is included within this area although there are limited areas of split-estate property (with private subsurface rights). The expanded area features significant additional cultural resources. The expanded area will now encompass all eight identified site groups associated with the Pueblo II occupation at Chimney Rock, including Peterson Mesa which includes a Chacoan-style Great House. Managing these significant sites as a complete unit will enhance research opportunities and our ability to better understand and interpret Chimney Rock.

The Forest Service manages Chimney Rock in partnership with the nonprofit Chimney Rock Interpretive Association (CRIA), which provides tours, special programs and operates a small visitor center from May to September under a Special Use Permit. CRIA collects minimal fees and sells some gift items and books to help meet their costs. The Forest Service and its local volunteers have been interpreting the site to the public for the last 17 years. As we manage for the many resources and benefits this site represents, we will continue to pay close attention to the importance of Chimney Rock to our tribal neighbors.

6. Are there opportunities for interpretation at Chimney Rock that are not available at other similar and nearby already-protected areas like Mesa Verde or Chaco Canyon?

The site differs from neighboring sites such as Mesa Verde in that it represents a different period of Ancestral Pueblo People's occupation and from Chaco Canyon in that it is an outlier, and offers insight on how the Chacoan Phenomenon was experienced outside of the core area. Geological features, astronomy, and archaeology intersect at Chimney



Rock. The dramatic pinnacles of Chimney Rock and Companion Rock are visible from all the Ancestral Pueblo People's villages identified within the monument. It has been suggested that the proximity to the pinnacles and alignments viewed through them is one reason for the Chacoan influence at Chimney Rock. The importance of astronomical alignments has been explored by many researchers. The best known archaeoastronomical alignment at Chimney Rock is the northern lunar standstill, during which the moonrise can be seen between the pinnacles from the Great House Pueblo at 18.6 year cycles. The two recognized construction phases at the Great House Pueblo in AD1076 and AD1093 coincide with lunar standstills. Other recognized alignments include those marking the summer and winter solstice, the fall and spring equinox.

7. Does the Forest Service expect any significant changes to management of this site as a national monument?

No significant changes are expected. Increased visitation may require some expansion of existing interpretive facilities and possibly some added recreational facilities, such as foot paths or trails.

8. Does the Forest Service have experience managing national monuments?

The Forest Service currently manages six other national monuments in Alaska (2), California (2), Oregon and Washington. Current Forest Service management of Chimney Rock, in collaboration with CRIA, has helped the site gain the recognition and reputation it currently has as an interpretive area.

9. How might monument designation affect the economies of nearby communities?

Designation as a national monument will likely bring additional dollars into the local and regional economy. Approximately 12,000 people visit Chimney Rock every year. Visitation is expected to increase by 20 to 60 percent now that it is a national monument.

10. What types of recreational activities are currently allowed at Chimney Rock and how would these be affected by monument designation?

Current recreational opportunities include archaeological visitation, astronomical and geological interpretation activities, hiking, bicycling, hunting, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The Forest Service will manage for these multiple-use opportunities as we continue to pay close attention to the importance of Chimney Rock to our tribal neighbors.

11. What are the existing interpretive and educational services offered at Chimney Rock?

As a well-preserved, stabilized site, portions of Chimney Rock are well suited for visitation and interpretation. Visitors can see what it might have been like to live at the site one thousand years ago. The interpretive program at Chimney Rock has been largely staffed with volunteers from CRIA, which provides tours, special programs and operates a small visitor center from May to September. In addition, traditional dances have been held at the site for 17 years and highlight the continued importance of the site to descendants of the Ancestral Pueblo People.

Research at Chimney Rock, including surveys, fill-reduction excavations conducted by the University of Colorado, architectural documentation, and geophysical surveys conducted by Colorado School of Mines that provide educational opportunities to university students. Although additional staffing needs might develop, the Forest Service anticipates continuing to work with its dedicated volunteers to provide services in the future.

12. How will research continue now that Chimney Rock is a national monument?

Future research would be guided by the management plan. Archaeological research on federal lands must adhere to a series of regulations including the Antiquities Act (1906), National Historic Preservation Act (1966, with subsequent amendments), Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979), and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1992).

13. Is grazing currently allowed in the area and how will it be affected by national monument designation?

The westernmost portion of the national monument falls within the Turkey Grazing Allotment and is grazed under a term permit issued by the Forest Service.

14. How will the potential for mining or fluid mineral extraction be affected within the national monument?

Much of the monument is currently withdrawn from oil and gas leasing. The monument designation will withdraw the remainder of the area, subject to valid existing rights.

15. Would monument designation affect fuels treatment of the area?

We anticipate that vegetative management treatments would continue to be used to address the risk of wildfire, insects, or diseases that could endanger the natural and cultural resources or threaten public safety. In order to manage for healthy forests and reduce the risk of severe fire and/or insect-caused mortality, it will be necessary to conduct thinning or prescribed burning with some periodic removal of timber or biomass. Reducing the risk of severe wildfire is a critical factor in protecting the objects of the monument. In terms of commercial harvesting opportunities, the area of the proposed monument is not within the timber management emphasis area as defined in the current San Juan National Forest Resource Management Plan (1992).

16. How would existing rights of way, power lines or pipelines crossing the area be affected by monument designation?

Any existing rights-of-way would not be affected, as the designation is subject to valid existing rights.